

Writing Effective SSU Academic Senate Resolutions

Overview

Resolutions are the mechanism used by the Senate to take a position or call for some entity to take action. An effective resolution is one that has an impact. While not every resolution will evoke an immediate response, resolutions can play an important role in giving a “sense of the Senate”. Resolutions typically come from one or more of the standing committees of the Senate. Frequently the resolution being brought forth falls within the purview of more than one standing committee and, in such cases, it may be co-sponsored. Thus, before a resolution gets to the floor of the Senate, it will typically be debated and “perfected” within the standing committee(s). Occasionally, a resolution will be introduced by one or more individual Senators and will not have been vetted by a standing committee. While this is not a common occurrence, it is an option provided for by Robert’s Rules of Order and the Academic Senate’s By-Laws.

The Process

For a resolution to be considered by the Academic Senate, the resolution must be on the agenda as a business item. In general, the best way to get a resolution on the Senate agenda is to bring the resolution to the Senate’s Executive Committee. The Executive Committee does not decide whether to endorse a resolution or whether it thinks the resolution will pass; rather, it critiques the resolution for “readiness” and provides suggestions to the resolution’s sponsor on changes that the Committee feels will help the resolution receive an effective hearing at the Senate. The Executive Committee also sets the advance agenda for the Senate meeting.

All SSU Senate business items, including resolutions, are given first and second Readings. At the First Reading resolutions are introduced and the Senate gives input to perfect the resolution, but amendments and other actions are not allowed. First reading items should be taken by Representative Senators to their constituents, so that it can be discussed and input can be give to the Senator. At the second reading the resolution is debated and the Senate votes on it. There are, however, items for which immediate action should be taken and it is possible to ask for a **waiver** of the rules to allow the item to be voted on during the meeting it is introduced. The downside of this is that the item is voted on without any input from the larger faculty. At the final meeting of the academic year, all items which have not been approved by the Senate “die” and can be introduced at the first meeting if the next academic year as a first reading.

Resolutions previously passed by the Senate can be searched for at <http://www.sonoma.edu/senate/resolutions/>. They are in chronological order by date of passage.

Key Points to Writing an Effective Resolution

SSU Senate resolutions should be written as series of Resolved clauses followed by a Rationale section. The one exception to this rule is that resolutions of commendation generally follow the Whereas format.

Resolved clauses contain the Senate position on an issue or request for an entity to take action and the rationale justifies the position/call for action; the last resolved clause often specifies who should receive a copy of the resolution. Resolved clauses move from the general to the specific. They often start with an affirmation/reaffirmation of general principles or positions the Senate has taken in the past, and then move to the specific current situation. When a resolution reiterates a call for action that was previously made in prior resolutions, it is standard practice to have a resolved clause referencing such prior resolutions. In general, a resolution will be more effective if different items are contained in separate resolved clauses.

The rationale begins with a summary or description of the current situation, and then builds an argument making the case for the position/request contained in the resolved clauses. The argument will typically include reference to past resolutions, positions taken by other bodies, factual material, an explanation or elaboration of key resolved clauses and the like.

There are stylistic conventions used in resolutions as well. When an entity with a formal title is first referred to, its name is written out in full followed by an abbreviation in parentheses. The abbreviation is used in subsequent references to the entity. An example would be Sonoma State University (SSU) Academic Senate, or Associated Students (AS) Senate. In terms of grammar, while the Senate is one body, grammatically it is treated as being in the plural, so the subjunctive verb form is used. Hence, resolved clauses would begin with “the Senate reaffirm” rather than the “Senate reaffirms.” Include a URL when reference is made to past resolutions or other documents available online.

An Example

Resolution opposing the potential cessation of awarding State University Grants to graduate students

Resolved: That the Academic Senate of Sonoma State University affirm the importance of graduate programs to the campus, including the quality of undergraduate programs, an importance that exceeds the size of graduate programs in terms of number of programs or student credit hours generated.

Resolved: That the Academic Senate affirm the importance to graduate programs of providing access to students of limited financial means.

Resolved: That the Academic Senate urge President Armiñana to advocate to the CSU Executive Council for continuing to award the State University Grant to graduate

students without any delay, suspension, or diminution of the program at its meeting the week of April 16.

Resolved: That the Academic Senate send a copy of this resolution to the Academic Senate (or similar body) at all other CSU campuses, the statewide Academic Senate, Chancellor Reed, Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer Ephraim P. Smith, and the Board of Trustees.

Rationale: Graduate programs, in addition to having value in their own right, support and enhance undergraduate programs. Graduate students provide teaching assistants or graduate assistants that support faculty teaching in undergraduate programs or directly support the undergraduate programs themselves. Graduate programs bring in resources that are shared with and thereby enhance the related undergraduate program. Graduate programs that offer no corresponding undergraduate programs offer valuable undergraduate courses that could not be supported without the graduate program.

Much has been made of SSU's status as a comprehensive university and the value to the campus of that status. The maintenance of quality graduate programs are an important aspect of the being a comprehensive university.

Background: Last month Vice Chancellors Ephraim Smith and Ben Quillian sent a memo to CSU Directors of Financial Aid requesting "...campuses to refrain from making graduate student SUG awards for the 2012-13 academic year due to possible changes to the awarding policy." Subsequent communications confirm that the Chancellor's office is considering reductions in or the suspension of the State University Grant for graduate students.

As you can see, the first two resolved clauses state clearly the Senate's position on the matter, the third requests that a specific action be taken, and the fourth indicates the distribution list for the document. The rationale is written in persuasive language and builds the case from a specific fact to reasons why the action requested in the resolution is appropriate. Be mindful that according to Robert's Rules, the Rationale must be voted on separately to be included with the final resolution.